

## **New President, New Administration, Possible Shift in the US Geopolitics?**

The 2016 US presidential elections are probably one of the most important elections in the recent history of the world. As the United States represent a global super power therefore their national elections necessarily have a global dimension. The next president of the US along with the new administration can bring some interesting changes to the country's foreign policy as well as global geopolitics. Surprisingly enough the presidential candidate, Mr. Donald Trump, who was mocked, ridiculed and portrayed as an underdog of these elections has won the presidential mandate. Though he is an experienced businessmen who managed to accomplish alot in the economic sphere, Mr. Trump has little or no experience regarding governance, policy making or any other "political" duty which a former senator or a member of the political establishment would have. This fact can be treated both as a liability and an asset. On the one hand you have a relatively inexperienced (in political matters at least) President who can jeopardize the country's foreign policy and its place as a global superpower. On the other hand you have a President who is unladen by the previous presidencies and their politics, this "clean start" combined with Mr. Trump's anti-establishment attitude can resonate positively in some other countries. The new American administration will have a major impact on the country's foreign policy either way. Positions such are Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, the next Director of the CIA and the President's relations with the Congress and the Senate are also very important aspects which will influence the future direction of the US foreign policy. Some of these positions have been already speculated in the media.

- Rudy Giuliani, a former New York mayor, is the most plausible candidate for the Secretary of State position. Often described as a neoconservative Mr. Giuliani also has a tougher stance towards Iran and believes in aggressive foreign policy.
- As some papers and analysts suggest Lt. General Mike Flynn could be a Secretary of Defense or on the position of National Security Advisor. The retired General served during the Cold War and operations such are Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The General is famous for his positive stance towards Russia but also for his accusations of President's Obama policy towards the Islamic State.
- Mike Pompeo is a republican congressman coming from Kansas who is also backed by the Koch Industries PAC, and according to some speculations he might take the seat as a future Director of the CIA. Mr. Pompeo is widely known for his harsh stance on the nuclear deal with Iran, support of the NSA's mass surveillance program and advocating for the extradition of Edward Snowden from Russia.

### *Russia*

Syria and Ukraine will probably be the main issues that Mr. Trump, along with his administration, will face when he takes office. However, all of these global issues are

connected to Russia and US relations with Russia. The Syrian question could potentially resolve much of the problems that US-Russia relations are facing today if Mr. Trump follows on his promises and joins Russian efforts to counter Islamic State and other terrorist organization in Syria. Nevertheless implementing such strategy will be difficult because it will alienate (to some degree) the US policy of ousting President Assad which regional allies, like Saudi Arabia and Israel, won't take lightly. Considering the importance of these regional allies for the US geopolitics in the Middle East combined with their lobbying power in Congress will require some serious political maneuvering from the next President in order to implement his joint Russian counter-terrorism operations. The Ukraine question though important for the US-Russia relations will probably be decided in context of US future relations to Europe and NATO. Since Mr. Trump has already stated that he sees Crimea as a part of Russia we can expect that America will have a more milder approach towards the Ukrainian problem and separatist movements in the eastern part of the country. Future elections in Europe and the popularization of conservative political parties like *Front National* or *Alternative für Deutschland*, which also share skepticism towards NATO and the EU, can also represent a crucial factor for the Ukraine if the next US President decides to support them. A right leaning Europe will seek more cooperation with Russia. All in all if the United States stay determined on practicing global policy based on the premises of the unipolar world view, which has been practiced by the previous administration, relations with other rising global powers including Russia won't change for the better.

#### *Middle East and North Africa*

Mr. Trump's Middle East policy has questioned the importance of the regional allies, such are Israel and Saudi Arabia, to the American interests in the region. Mr. Trump is inclined to view these long-term US allies as regional players rather than important assets which allow United States to project its influence and power throughout the MENA region. This approach of course brings another question, if Israel and Saudi Arabia are not in the focus of the US Middle Eastern policy does the US need to guarantee for their security? If the next President decides to adopt the policy of great power concerts or spheres of influence it can easily divide the MENA region between various powers which will also include players like Turkey and Iran who will have much broader field of interests. Naturally this will affect further relations with these countries. Turkey's sway from the Western powers might be tolerated if the new administration decides to adopt such policies or Mr. Trump follows on his promise and somehow dissolves NATO, which is highly unlikely.

However, the Iranian nuclear issue will probably be one of the main "problems" in the region and for the US foreign policy. While campaigning Mr. Trump stated many times that the deal with Iran is not good and that when he wins the election one of the first things on his agenda would be to nullify the deal or "tear it apart". In all honesty, the deal isn't perfect. The deal doesn't prohibit Iran to further develop its nuclear research but only to direct it away from developing nuclear weapons. Furthermore many believe that Iran hasn't done

enough on the issues of human rights despite the lifting of economic sanctions, also Iran's support for Hezbollah is still treated as "supporting terrorism" in the Western world. However, nullifying the Iranian deal would do more harm than good. It took many years and a vast amount of diplomatic effort to bring Iran and various other countries to the negotiating table, any radical changes to the deal would inevitably destroy confidence or trust among the negotiating parties. Abandoning the deal America would only send a signal that it doesn't recognize any progress made by the Iranian government. This could possibly result with Iran's retaliatory move in form of further nuclear development (unchecked and unauthorized), accelerated uranium enrichment program and overall deterioration in diplomatic relations. As I said earlier a vast amount of effort has been invested into this deal and many countries are expecting positive results, faced with these factors there is a little chance that the US will abandon the Iranian deal.

American diplomatic pragmatism will be also tested in Syria, Iraq, Libya and with the Kurdish question. Syria and Iraq, which are facing the Islamic State problem, could be resolved quickly if the President elect decides to follow up on his promises and works with Russia in the region. Partnership with Russia against Islamic State will have other consequences in regards to President Assad and SAA who are still treated as a bigger threat than the Islamic State in some Western power circles. The new American administration won't be focusing on Libya, at least in the beginning, because of the more pressing matters. The Libyan issue will become attractive once the Islamic State problem is resolved or contained, mainly because much of the IS structure (combatants, fighters, equipment etc.) will be transferred over to Libya. During its mandate Mr. Trump will also face the Kurdish question and the eventual possibility of forming some kind of Kurdish state (or autonomy) in Syria and Iraq. Scenario such as this will put US in a rather difficult position. The US will need to choose between the Kurds who are literally allowing US troops and Air Force to be present in Syria and Turkey which is a long term ally, NATO member and a very important geopolitical asset for the West.

### *China*

Between Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton China certainly prefers a businessman rather than a former Secretary of State considering that stability is one of the primary things that Beijing is trying to preserve. Although Mr. Trump has a strong rhetoric towards China it is mostly directed at economic issues, unlike his adversary Mrs. Clinton who would probably go into deeper confrontation with the Chinese government over territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Mr. Trump's pro-business attitude will be saluted by the Chinese investors and the Chinese government however China's constant economic expansion, especially on the US soil, isn't welcomed by Mr. Trump nor his advisors. Still, this sharp language towards China and its economy might be an election promise that never comes to past. The strong stance towards China is also in contradiction with the promises of abolishing TPP and focusing on bilateral agreements which would be beneficial for Beijing quite allot. In the end

the new American administration can follow an aggressive "hawkish" foreign policy eventually starting a conflict with China in the economic sphere, or the US can make a deal with Beijing separating their spheres of influence which is in line with the "great power concerts" policy that some believe Mr. Trump may implement.

### *European Union and NATO*

Results of the US elections left many European states surprised as well as the EU's administration. Electing a candidate with a clear conservative political agenda who supported Brexit and who is against multilateral-transnational deals and organizations, makes EU and NATO structure rather uncomfortable. Despite the obvious anti-establishment stance America simply cannot drift away or abandon organizations such as EU or NATO. These organizations are one of the primary pillars of US global power and influence in terms of politics, economics and military. However the new American administration can push for some changes in these transnational organizations. These reforms can be ideological, financial or structural. Ideological reforms could be seen in the upcoming elections in Europe, mainly in France and Germany. If the US supports conservative options such as *Front National* or *Alternative für Deutschland* the structure of the EU will surely change, furthermore electing these political parties will reflect on the EU's foreign and financial policy. Though this is a possibility, we can already see that current European governments are aligning themselves and their politics to this newly created situation.

NATO's role in the last couple of years has been focused on the Eastern Europe and the Russian threat, while disregarding more serious threats as Islamic State and evolving chaos which is engulfing the MENA region. The previous American administration managed to create a Cold War atmosphere using the alliance and the situation in Ukraine, at the same time neglecting rising extremism in Europe and uncontrolled immigration. It seems as though NATO and its structure is stuck somewhere in the eighties unable to classify, determine and assess new threats and challenges while heating up tensions with former adversaries. In the financial aspect many NATO countries simply cannot cope with the rising expenses of the alliance. Regarding these factors NATO does need some kind of reform and no other member but the US can implement such a reform. Mr. Trump has already stated his dissatisfaction with the alliance, but leaving or abandoning NATO won't be an option. The US has invested too much into this organization and the countries which are part of it, furthermore many NATO countries are heavy consumers of American military industrial complex and its products. Nevertheless the US is the only NATO member able to implement much needed reforms for this organization. These reforms will need to grasp not only problems in the structure and finance but also in the policy and strategy of the alliance in order to grapple with the next generation threats.

## *Conclusion*

The next President of the United States along with his cabinet will influence the direction of the US foreign policy in the next couple of years. It's clear that Mr. Trump is leaning towards a more conservative structure of the future cabinet, especially in key positions such as Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, which can have an interesting effect on his election promises for the foreign policy. Firstly, a compromise with Russia over some important questions like Syria or Ukraine with or without neoconservatives in the cabinet won't be easy. Secondly, further complication with the Russians can come if the new American administration decides to destroy the Iranian nuclear deal. Both parties have worked hard on making that deal possible, however the Israeli influence can be a crucial factor for the Trump's administration. We shouldn't forget that though the US is a global power it also faces internal problems, massive protests and demonstrations that have been occurring in the United States in recent past can reflect on the country's overall stability. Finally the elite (both global and American) can have a major influence on the future President and his cabinet thus potentially manipulating the course of foreign policy. The elite can be a crucial factor or challenge for the upcoming President since many of them were betting, lobbying and wishing for a quite different head of state. These are just some of the directions in which the upcoming US foreign policy may take. Mr. Trump's promises and visions for the future American foreign relations can be altered or changed entirely depending on the team of people who are going to take important seats in the next Presidential cabinet and many other factor internal and external factors.

*IGOR PEJIC, graduated Political Science Foreign Affairs Department at the Faculty of Political Science and MA in Terrorism, Security and Organized Crime at the University of Belgrade, Serbia.*